

now. In 1595 his 'adoptive daughter, Mile,
de Gournay,
a young lady of Picardy who had been
thrown into such
raptures by discovering the *Essais* some ten
years before,
that her relatives dosed her with hellebore,
saw through
the press a final edition. But Montaigne
himself did not
see it. Three years before, he had quietly
closed at home
the Book of Life.

What does he still offer the modern
reader? First,
himself—the most vivid portrait we have
from four cen-
turies ago. With his gift and his passion for
intimacy he
sets himself body and mind before us—a
short man, with
a high and loud voice, even in talking to
princes, and
easily excited to exaggerate; fidgety, even on
the most
ceremonious occasions, so that he likes a
stick to gesticu-
late with; given to scratching ('des
gratifications de nature
des plus doulces'), particularly to scratching
his ears;
riding rather than walking, the more so as
litde men get
hustled in the streets; eating only twice a
day, but so
eagerly as to bite tongue and fingers (for he
uses knife and
fork little and needs his napkin the more);
especially fond
of high game, of sauces, of melons, and of
fish (so that
fast-days are no fasts to him); not content
with less than
eight or nine hours' sleep, usually dreamless,
with plenty
of bedclothes, and his bed to himself, *h la*
wyale given to
wearing all white or all black; fond of
reading (through a
coloured glass), but without having read a

book for as
much as an hour on end in twenty years;
delighting in
conversation, except after meals when he
needs to be
quiet and prefers to listen, but hopelessly
clumsy and
incompetent at any game or practical
occupation—such
(not to mention various other peculiarities
now scarcely
mentionable) is Michel de Montaigne,
prepared to talk
endlessly about himself and life. Are not the
two subjects,
in fact, the same; and one man the epitome of
all?